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ABSTRACT

The development of a "global village" strongly demands the ability of intercultural sensitivity between people for survival in the 21st century. Due to current lack of study on the subject, this paper aims to: (1) provide a conceptualization of intercultural sensitivity; (2) specify the role intercultural sensitivity plays in intercultural training programs; (3) delineate the components of intercultural sensitivity; and (4) critique and suggest directions for future study in this line of research. As a result, a working definition of intercultural sensitivity is generated. The components of intercultural sensitivity examined include: self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement, and non-judgment. In addition, the paper discusses confusion among intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural competence and suggests future directions for research in intercultural sensitivity. Contains 72 references. (Author)

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A Review of the Concept of Intercultural Sensitivity

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Abstract

The development of a "global village" strongly demands the ability of intercultural sensitivity between people for all of us to survive in the 21st century. Due to the lack of study on the subject, this paper aims (1) to provide a conceptualization of intercultural sensitivity, (2) to specify the role intercultural sensitivity plays in intercultural training programs, (3) to delineate the components of intercultural sensitivity, and (4) to critique and suggest directions for future study in this line of research.

As a result, a working definition of intercultural sensitivity is generated. The components of intercultural sensitivity examined include: (1) self-esteem, (2) self-monitoring, (3) open-mindedness, (4) empathy, (5) interaction involvement, and (6) non-judgment. In addition, the confusion among intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural competence is discussed and future directions for research in intercultural sensitivity is suggested.

A Review of the Concept of Intercultural Sensitivity

Chen and Starosta (1996) specified five trends that lead our world into a global society in which intercultural communication competence becomes a required ability for citizens in the 21st century to survive and live meaningfully and productively: (1) the development of communication and transportation technology links people of different cultural backgrounds and every part of the world together, (2) the globalization of world economy requires employees from multinational corporations to communicate with those in other parts of the world in order to be competitive in the global economic system, (3) the widespread population migrations across national borders have restructured the fabric of modern society that has become much more culturally diverse than it has been in the past, (4) the development of multiculturalism has affected every aspect of life in the United States in which new workforce will comprise persons who are diverse in race, culture, age, gender, and language, and (5) the de-emphasis of nation-state had led nations to form regional alliances and people to reassert ethnic and gender differences within the nation.

Among the trends, the widespread population migrations and the development of multiculturalism show the most impact on USAmerican society. For example, in 1940 seventy percent of immigrants to the United States originated from Europe. Half a century later, fifteen percent come from Europe, thirty-seven percent from Asia, and forty-four percent from Latin America and the Caribbean. The current ethnic breakdown for the United States includes 80 percent White, 12 percent Black, 6.4 percent Hispanic, and 1.6 percent Asian. Given no new exclusionary legislation, by the year 2050 the population of U.S. white ethnics will decrease to 60 percent, while Asians increase tenfold, Hispanics triple their numbers, and African Americans increase their proportion but slightly (Nieto, 1992).

Shifts in the U.S. population structure influence the USAmerican educational system and organizational life. Educationally, while about 27 percent of U.S. public school students are persons of color, African American and Latino student populations presently dominate 22 of the 25 largest central-city school districts. Co-culture majority school systems may increase in number by the year 2000.

Meanwhile, the number of U.S. children who speak a non-English language will increase from 2 million in 1986, to 5 million by 2020 (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990; Vadivieso & David, 1988). The influx of non-native speakers of English requires the educational system to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of recent immigrants and their children, promotes learning, and accommodates differing communication styles of recent immigrants that may not match those of teachers and counselors (Sue, 1994).

Persons of co-cultures within the United States consume more goods and services than do any of the USAmerica's trading partners, and will constitute 25% of the U.S. economic market by the year 2000 (Foster, Jackson, Cross, Jackson, & Hardiman, 1988). If companies are to attract and retain new workers, they must recruit persons of varying heritages and ethnicity. Companies that fail to promote minorities and women to higher levels of management in the organization will lose their competitive edge (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990). Therefore, companies must begin now the creative planning and the introduction of new workplace configurations in order to make best use of the talents of non-traditional employees (Goldstein & Gilliam, 1990).

It is clear that cultural diversity or multiculturalism has become the norm rather than the exception in USAmerican life. The changing cultural character of neighborhoods, schools, and the workplace calls for us all to adapt to the unfamiliar and to learn to work and live together without being influenced by the differences people may bring to an encounter. All these events lead to a strong demand for greater understanding, sensitivity and competency among people from differing cultural backgrounds. It is the purpose of this paper to examine one of the most important abilities that helps us live successfully in the culturally diverse society: intercultural sensitivity. The discussion is separated into four sections: (1) definition of intercultural sensitivity, (2) intercultural

sensitivity and training programs, (3) components of intercultural sensitivity, (4) critique and directions for future research, and (5) conclusion.

A Definition of Intercultural Sensitivity

Bronfenbrener, Harding, and Gallwey's study (1958) is one of the early studies dealing with the concept of sensitivity. They proposed that sensitivity to the generalized other and sensitivity to individual differences (i.e., interpersonal sensitivity) are the two major types of ability in social perception. Sensitivity to the generalized other is a "kind of sensitivity to the social norms of one's own group" (McClelland, 1958, p. 241), and interpersonal sensitivity is the ability to distinguish how others differ in their behavior, perceptions or feelings (Bronfenbrener, et al., 1958). Intercultural sensitivity is similar to interpersonal sensitivity indicated by Bronfenbrener et al.

Hart and Burks (1972) and Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980) treated sensitivity as a mind-set which is applied in one's everyday's life. They proposed that sensitive persons should be able to accept personal complexity, to avoid communication inflexibility, to be conscious in interaction, to appreciate the ideas exchanged, and to tolerate intentional searching. These elements appear to be embedded in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of intercultural interaction.

Based on Gudykunst and Hammer's (1983) three-stage intercultural training model and Hoopes' 1981) intercultural learning model, Bennett (1984) conceived intercultural sensitivity as a developmental process in which one is able to transform oneself affectively, cognitively, and behaviorally from ethnocentric stages to ethnorelative stages. The route of this transformation process can further separate into six stages: (1) denial -- in which one denies the existence of cultural differences among people, (2) defense -- in which one attempts to protect one's world view by countering the perceived threat, (3) minimization -- in which one attempts to protect the core of one's world view by concealing differences in the shadow of cultural similarities, (4) acceptance -- in which one begins to accept the existence of behavioral differences and underlying cultural differences, (5) adaptation -- in which one becomes empathic to cultural differences and becomes bicultural or multicultural, and (6) integration -- in which one is able to apply ethnorelativism to one's own identity and can experience "difference as an essential and joyful aspect of all life" (p. 186).

Bennett's model of intercultural sensitivity not only requires the gradual change of affection and cognition, but also the behavioral ability to reach the state of intercultural communication competence. Conceptually, Bennett's perception on intercultural sensitivity seems identical with the concept of intercultural communication competence which has been under investigation by other scholars (Chen, 1989, 1990, 1992, Hammer, 1989; Lustig & Koester, 1996; Martin & Hammer, 1989; Ruben, 1976, 1988; Ruben & Kealey, 1979; Spitzberg, 1989; Wiseman & Koester, 1993).

Finally, Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) attempted to develop an instrument for measuring intercultural sensitivity from the perspective of individualism versus collectivism. The authors used the concept of intercultural communication competence to develop intercultural sensitivity measurement which bases on the elements of affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. Those elements used by the authors include: (1) the understanding of the different ways one can behave, (2) the open-mindedness concerning the differences one encounters, and (3) the degree of behavioral flexibility one demonstrates in a new culture.

The above review provides a foundation for the conceptualization of intercultural sensitivity. However, two confusions need to be clarified before we can generate a working definition of the concept. First, although intercultural sensitivity is related to the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of interactional situation, it mainly deals with our affective. It is concerned with the emotion Second, intercultural awareness (cognitive) is the foundation of intercultural sensitivity (affective) which, in turn, will lead to intercultural competence (behavioral). In other words, the

three are closely related but separated concepts. Thus, intercultural sensitivity can be conceptualized as "an individual's ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes an appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication." This definition shows that intercultural sensitivity is a dynamic concept. It reveals that interculturally sensitive persons must have a desire to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate, and accept differences among cultures, and to produce a positive outcome from intercultural interactions.

Intercultural Sensitivity and Training Programs

The increasing importance of intercultural sensitivity in the global and multicultural society has led many scholars and experts to examine the concept from different perspectives. Practically, the concept has been integrated into intercultural training programs that are initiated to develop the ability of intercultural sensitivity. Those training programs include "T-groups," critical incidents, case studies, role playing, and cultural orientation programs (Brislin, 1981; Cushner & Landis, 1996; Seidel, 1981; Yum, 1989).

A common goal of intercultural training is to develop intercultural sensitivity by increasing awareness of cultural differences and attempts to develop one's communication potential while lessening the likelihood of intercultural misunderstandings (Cargile & Giles, 1996). In other words, the intercultural training programs aim to "develop an appreciation and understanding of cross-cultural differences and to acquire some of the necessary abilities, such as an increased awareness and sensitivity to cultural stimuli and better human relations skills" (Seidel, 1981, p. 184). Morgan and Weigel (1988) pointed out that the major purpose of the above mentioned training programs is to develop intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural sensitivity is a prerequisite for intercultural effectiveness.

As an essential element to the positive outcome of intercultural encounter, the importance of intercultural sensitivity can also be examined from the six general categories of intercultural training programs: affective training, cognitive training, behavioral training, area simulation training, cultural awareness training, and self-awareness training (Brislin, Landis, & Brandt, 1983; Gudykunst, Guzley, & Hammer, 1996; Gudykunst, Hammer, & Wiseman, 1977; Seidel, 1981).

According to Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, and Wiseman (1991), the affective training is designed to increase trainees' motivation and sensitivity to communication with people from other cultures and ethnic groups. The cognitive training is to promote understanding of cultural differences and similarities. The behavioral training provides skill training so that participants learn to communicate more effectively with people of other cultures. The area simulation training requires that participants spend a period of time in a cultural or ethnic neighborhood and to interact fully with the residents in order to gain the real experience of intercultural encounters. The cultural awareness training requires participants to understand the aspects of culture that are universal and specific. Finally, the self-awareness training is to help participants identify attitudes, opinions, and biases that influence the way they communicate.

Among these training programs the affective training, cognitive training, self-awareness training, and cultural awareness training focus on the cognitive and affective understanding of one's own as well as the host culture. The area simulation training and the behavioral training focus on the teaching of "specific behaviors" that are used to better adjust to a new culture. Seidel's (1981) integrated the purposes of these training programs into sensitivity approach that clearly defines specific spheres of training in the three areas: appreciation and sensitivity (affective), understanding and awareness (cognitive), and skills (behavioral).

Therefore, with the emphasis on an integrated approach, the search for an appropriate definition of intercultural sensitivity should be grounded in the affective aspect, and extended to include cognitive and behavioral components. Thus, Parker, Valley, & Geary (1986) reasoned that

intercultural sensitivity can be achieved through a combination of cognitive, affective and behavioral procedures, because the effectiveness of intercultural communication requires interactants to appropriately demonstrate the ability of intercultural awareness, sensitivity, and competence. This is supported by Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) study showing that the problems encountered by people in intercultural interaction are cognitive re-orientation (i.e., cognitive), changes in feelings (i.e., affective), and overt behaviors (i.e., behavioral). Therefore, with an emphasis on intercultural sensitivity intercultural training programs also aim to increase intercultural awareness and develop intercultural competency.

Components of Intercultural Sensitivity

Because intercultural sensitivity focuses on personal emotions that are caused by particular situations, people, and environment (Triandis, 1977), it carries a notion that an interculturally sensitive individual is able to project and receive positive emotional responses before, during, and after intercultural interaction. It especially refers to the attitude of respect (Adler & Towne, 1993). Without knowing how to show respect to others or cultural differences in the process of intercultural communication usually leads to a lower degree of satisfaction. According to Gudykunst and Kim (1992), a successful integration of affective and cognitive processes can help people achieve an adequate social orientation that enables them to understand their own as well as the feelings and behaviors of others. Thus, in order to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences and eventually promote the ability of intercultural competence, interculturally sensitive persons must possess the following elements: self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement, and non-judgment.

Self-Esteem

A culturally sensitive person usually shows higher degrees of self-esteem. Self-esteem is a sense of self-value or self-worth. It is based on one's perception of how well one can develop one's potential in social environment (Borden, 1991). A high self-esteem person usually has an optimistic outlook which instills confidence in interaction with others (Foote & Cottrell, 1955). Hamachek (1982) also concluded that persons with high self-esteem are likely to think well of others and to expect to be accepted by others. In intercultural encounters, where people inevitably meet psychological stresses when trying to complete their jobs and to establish relationships with others, self-esteem becomes an important variable in the calculation of whether or not they can fulfill their needs. It is self-esteem that enhances the positive emotion towards accurately recognize and respect the situational differences in intercultural interactions.

Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring refers to a person's ability to regulate behavior in order to match situational constraints and to implement a conversationally competent behavior. Persons with high self-monitoring are particularly sensitive to the appropriateness of their social behaviors and self-presentation in social interaction (Snyder, 1974). Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) indicated that high self-monitors are more attentive, other-oriented, and adaptable to diverse communication situations. In interaction, high self-monitoring persons are more able to use strategies such as compromise, emotional appeals, coercion, ingratiation, and referent influence (Farmer, Fedor, Goodman, & Maslyn, 1993; Smith, Cody, Lovette, & Canary, 1990). Berger and Douglas (1982) also reported that high self-monitoring helps people to better adapt their behaviors to different situations and are more competent in communication. In intercultural communication persons who are high in self-

monitoring are also likely to be more sensitive to the expressions of their counterparts and know how to use situational cues to guide their self-presention (Gudykunst, Yang, & Nishida, 1987). These studies show that self-monitoring equips us an ability of sensitivity to detect the situational cues and further develop a set of appropriate behaviors to fit the situation.

Open-Mindedness

Open-mindedness refers to the willingness of individuals to openly and appropriately explain themselves and accept other's explanations. This is parallel to Adler's (1977) concept of "multicultural man" who accepts the "life patterns different from his or her own and who has psychologically and socially come to grips with a multiplicity of realities" (p. 25). Bennett (1986) indicated that intercultural sensitive persons possess an internalized broadened concept of the world. This is to mean that intercultural sensitive persons are open-minded. Culturally insensitive or narrow-minded persons are doomed to suffer a dying fate (Barnlund, 1988). Like rhetorically sensitive persons, interculturally sensitive persons understand that an idea can be rendered in multi-form ways (Hart & Burks, 1972).

Ingrained in open-mindedness is the willingness to recognize, accept, and appreciate different views and ideas. Yum (1989) indicated that sensitivity motivates people to understand and acknowledge other people's needs and makes them more adaptive to differences in culturally diverse situations. Smith (1966) also pointed out that being sensitive means having consideration for others, being receptive to others' needs and differences and being able to transfer such emotions to actions. It is a process of mutual validation and confirmation of cultural identities that will foster a favorable impression in intercultural communication (Ting-Toomey, 1989).

Empathy

Empathy has been long recognized as a central element for intercultural sensitivity. Empathy refers to the process of projecting oneself "into another person's point of view so as momentarily to think the same thoughts and feel the same emotions as the other person" (Adler & Towne, 1987, p. 95). Empathy allows us to sense what is inside another's mind or to step into another person's shoes. Others call it "affective sensitivity" (Campbell, Kagan, & Drathwohl, 1971), "telepathic or intuition sensitivity" (Gardner, 1962), or "perspective-taking" (Parks, 1976).

According to Barnlund (1988), interculturally sensitive persons tend to look for communication symbols that will enable them to share other's experiences. Interculturally sensitive persons will not take the same role without regard to situations (Hart, Carlson, & Eadie, 1980). Moreover, empathic persons are also judged to be more selfless as well as having more concern for the other interactant's feelings and reactions (Davis, 1983). In other words, they are able to judge accurately the behaviors or internal states of their communication counterparts (Parks, 1994). As a result, empathy allows us to demonstrate reciprocity of affect displays, active listening, and verbal responses that show understanding. It develops a mutual understanding which will lead to an establishment of an intercultural rapport (Barnlund, 1988). This is the reason Coke, Bateson, and McDavis (1978) contend that empathy allows a person to possess a higher degree of feeling of sympathy and concern toward others. Hence, the display of identification, understanding and consideration to others are characteristics of empathy which forms the essence of intercultural sensitivity and leads a person to be competent in intercultural communication (Bennet, 1979; Gudykunst, 1993; Yum, 1989).

Interaction Involvement

Interaction involvement is the ability of individuals to perceive the topic and situation that

involves their conception of self and self-reward (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). It emphasizes a person's sensitivity ability in interaction. Cegala (1981, 1982, 1984) considered interaction involvement to be fundamental to human communication process. His research shows that interaction involvement is comprised of responsiveness, perceptiveness, and attentiveness.

Being responsive, perceptive, and attentive enables interculturally sensitive persons to better receive and understand messages, to take appropriate turns, and to initiate and terminate an intercultural interaction fluently and appropriately. In other words, interculturally sensitive persons know how to "handle the procedural aspects of structuring and maintaining a conversation" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, p. 46).

Non-Judgment

Being non-judgmental refers to an attitude that allows one to sincerely listen to others during intercultural communication. Non-sensitive persons tend to hastily jump to conclusion without having the sufficient data in interaction (Hart & Burks, 1972). Thus, intercultural sensitivity is the avoidance of issuing rash judgments on the valuable inputs of others. This way allows the other party to be psychologically satisfied and happy that s/he has been listened to actively.

In intercultural interaction being non-judgmental tends to foster a feeling of enjoyment towards cultural differences. Interculturally sensitive persons not only need to acknowledge and accept cultural differences, but need to establish a sentiment of enjoyment which usually leads to a satisfactory feeling towards intercultural encountering. Research has shown that several types of enjoyment in intercultural interaction for intercultural sensitivity: (1) the enjoyment of interacting with people from different cultures (Randolph, Landis, & Tzeng, 1977), (2) the enjoyment of increasing good working relations with others from different cultures (Fiedler, Mitchell, & Triandis, 1971), and (3) the enjoyment of one's duties in another culture (Gudykunst, Hammer, & Wiseman, 1977).

Critique and Directions for Future Research

Although intercultural sensitivity is treated as one of the necessary elements for a successful communication in intercultural settings and many intercultural training programs aim to increase the ability of intercultural sensitivity, the study of the concept still suffers from conceptual and operational fragmentation and ambiguity. No clear definition of intercultural sensitivity can be found in existing literature. One of the biggest problems is embedded in the confusion of the concept and intercultural awareness and intercultural competence. As mentioned previously, intercultural scholars and practioners tend to mingle the three concepts without giving them a clear distinction. The confusion not only jeopardizes the validity and reliability of study results in this line of research, but also affects the outcome of intercultural training programs.

In this paper we suggested that the three concepts are closely related but separated. Intercultural awareness is the cognitive aspect of intercultural communication. It refers to the understanding of cultural conventions that affect how people think and behave. Intercultural awareness requires individuals understand that, from their own cultural perspective, they are a cultural being and use this understanding as a foundation to further figure out the distinct characteristics of other cultures inn order that they can effectively interpret others' behaviors in intercultural interactions (Triandis, 1977). Because every culture shows a different thought pattern, misunderstanding these differences often causes serious problems in intercultural communication (Glenn & Glenn, 1981; Oliver, 1962). Thus, to be successful in intercultural interactions we must first show the ability of intercultural awareness by learning the similarities and differences of each other's culture. However, the process of awareness of cultural similarities and differences is enhanced and buffered by intercultural sensitivity. Unless a person shows a positive emotion towards learning, understanding,

recognizing, and respecting the cultural similarities and differences, intercultural awareness is unreachable.

Intercultural competence is the behavioral aspect of intercultural communication. It refers to the ability to behave effectively and appropriately in intercultural interactions (Chen & Starosta, 1996). It concerns how to get the job done and attain communication goals through verbal and nonverbal behaviors in intercultural interactions. The effectiveness and appropriateness of behavioral performance is regulated by the cognitive understanding and affective sensitivity of cultural similarities and differences. Thus, intercultural awareness and intercultural sensitivity are the prerequisites for being competent in intercultural interactions.

To sum up, intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural competence form the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of intercultural communication. They are three separated but mutually dependent elements that combine to lead individuals to reach a successfully intercultural interaction. Future research needs to take the distinction of the three elements into account before a more valuable contributions can be made.

Conclusion

Intercultural sensitivity has become a strong demand for living harmoniously and meaningfully in today's pluralistic world. Together with intercultural awareness and intercultural competence, intercultural sensitivity is a vital element for successful communication in a global village (Barnlund, 1988). Unfortunately, most of the studies of intercultural sensitivity lack a clear conceptualization and are entangled with intercultural awareness and intercultural competence. This paper first discusses why it is important to attain the ability of intercultural sensitivity in the 21st century that is characterized by multiculturalism and interdependence. We then provides a working definition by conceptualizing intercultural sensitivity as our ability to "develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promote an appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication."

The relationship between intercultural sensitivity and intercultural training programs is delineated. We continue to specify the components of intercultural sensitivity. They include self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement, and non-judgment. Finally, the conceptual confusion and ambiguity of intercultural sensitivity is critiqued. The differences among intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness, and intercultural competence are clarified. It is urged that the distinction among the three concepts should be taken into account before future research is conducted in this area.

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